

THE REPUBLICAN

Massachusetts Treasurer Deb Goldberg urges public-private partnership to close wage gap between women, men



State Treasurer Deb Goldberg, seen in this file photo, was in Springfield on Friday to moderate a panel of wage inequality in the Bay State. Goldberg has formed a task force on the issue and is conducting a series of roundtable discussions across the state to come up with solutions to the problem. UMass Center Springfield at Tower Square was the site for the first regional meeting

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SPRINGFIELD — State Treasurer [Deb Goldberg](#) pledged to provide public and private employers with a "tool box" of policies and strategies to fight the persistence of [wage inequality](#) in the Bay State – especially among women and minorities.

Goldberg, who created a state task force on wage inequality, reiterated her campaign pledge as she moderated an 1½ hour regional roundtable discussion at UMass Center at Springfield Friday, the first of several she is holding throughout the commonwealth to learn best employment practices throughout the state.

The gap between men and women in pay remains stubbornly persistent, even in a "progressive state like Massachusetts," she said.

Women earn 77 cents on the dollar nationally, she said. "It's 82.5 cents on the dollar in Massachusetts – but the gap gets even wider for women of color."

One panelist noted that women college graduates earn \$500,000 less than men over a lifetime of work.

"This is not just a moral issue," Goldberg said. "It's a business issue."

Goldberg said her office hopes to provide an example for other employers by providing paid parental leave and flexible time for the people who work in her office.

Employees at of the treasurer's office get 12 weeks paid parental leave, which applies to both men and women. The leave can be used by employees who are adopting children or becoming foster parents.

Several panelists said providing fair pay and good benefits is cost-effective for businesses because they are able to retain talented workers.

Well-paid workers also fuel the American consumer economy, several said.

A panel of six business leaders from the region included:

1. Elizabeth Barajas-Roman, CEO of the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts;
2. Heriberto Flores, president of the New England Farm Workers;
3. Denis Guyer, operations manager for Jane Iredale Mineral Cosmetics Ltd. of Great Barrington;
4. Ellen Kennedy, president of Berkshire Community College;
5. Betsy Larson, vice president for compensation at MassMutual;
6. Andrew Morehouse, executive director of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts;
7. Karl Petrick, associate professor of economics at Western New England University.

Following are comments made by the panelists:

Elizabeth Barajas-Roman: Wage inequality is difficult to reverse because inequities are institutionally and structurally engrained at many companies, she said. An analytical look at employment practices, including recruitment, hiring, compensation, promotions and pregnancy policies could lead to reforms, she said.

Karl Petrick: Companies fail to realize the macro-effect of wage inequality, he said. "As Bill Clinton said, 'it's the economy, stupid.'" By not addressing the pay gap, businesses are taking money out of their own till," by limiting workers' buying power. Fair pay is good for morale, it limits turnover and the staff feels invested in the company which translates to better customer service and more customers in the door. Wage equality is "good for the bottom line and good for the overall economy," he said.

Betsy Larson: MassMutual is committed to wage equality, workforce diversity and inclusion and has policies to back up its goals. About 40 percent of MassMutual employees in executive leadership positions, she said. And one-third of the company's board is made up of women. The company does a yearly analysis of its compensation policies in terms, which is conducted by an independent third party. The rigorous statistical analysis enables the company to find weaknesses in its efforts to promote gender wage equality in a transparent way, she said.

Ellen Kennedy: One of the challenges businesses face in promoting wage equality is the drive for profits she said. Colleges and universities, for example, promote wage inequality by hiring lower-paid adjunct faculty members as college administrators try to keep the cost of higher education affordable.

Denis Guyer: Working in a small company where six out of 8 employees are women, Guyer said his company focuses on mentoring employees to build their confidence to become future leaders of the company. The company's Great Barrington office includes a lactation room for nursing mothers and makes building security a focus," he said.

Heriberto Flores: The women the Farm Workers Council serves aren't even on the wage scale, he said, noting that it is his agency's job to help them improve their earning power with educational and job training services. Flores said bridging the wage gap will fight poverty and drive economic prosperity.

Andrew Morehouse: The non-profit, which provides food for the hungry, sees the repercussions of wage inequality first-hand, he said, noting that more women are food insecure than men. "Thirty-four percent of households headed by women are food insecure, compared to 23 percent for households headed by men, he said.